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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 005891

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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE
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SUBJECT: PRT/PANSHJIR: KABUL-PANJSHIR RELATIONS PART II:
THE CAPITAL IN THE PROVINCE

REF: KABUL 5810

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Several events this year have attracted GOA officials from Kabul to Panjshir, but there is no steady flow of central government visits. Since his election, President Karzai has yet to visit the province. The Panjshir Governor, although appointed by the GOA, operates more as a Panjshir envoy to the capital than a Kabul representative in the province. The valley has benefited from very few GOA funded "pork projects". The improved road link has brought Kabul closer to the province. Traffic has increased three-fold this year in and out of the valley, much of it from Kabul. Indeed, the road may have started a process of "Kabulization" of the valley, but it still lacks a strong GOA component. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) In terms of political, commercial and people-to-people ties, the PRT has witnessed several dramatic changes between Panjshir and Kabul this past year. This is the second of two messages on the subject. Part I (reftel) examined the role of Panjshiris in Kabul. Part II reports on Kabulites in Panjshir.

Kabulites in Panjshir: Locals Disappointed With Them

¶3. (U) As noted in reftel, several Panjshiris hold positions of prominence in the central government in Kabul, including First vice-president Massoud, National Directorate of Security (NDS) Director Saleh, Wolesi Jirga Speaker Qanooni, Meshrano Jirga members Fahim Khan and Aref Sarwari, and Army Chief of Staff Bismullah Khan. They all have large houses, with the exception of Qanooni, and numerous relatives in the valley. They are occasional visitors to the home province, most frequently on summer weekends. The improved road has shortened the commute from Kabul to under three hours.

14. (SBU) In the popular perception, however, these Panjshiris have not established a community presence nor exercised much local leadership. The PRT hears frequent complaints that the GOA Panjshiris have failed to direct developmental funds to Panjshir. They have, to be sure, supported a few local projects out of their own pockets, but only after arm-twisting from the Governor. For example, Aref, Saleh and Former FM Abdullah have all underwritten schools near their homes. Fahim Khan is single-handedly financing the new central mosque with USD 135,000. Bismullah Khan helped build a mosque in his neighborhood. VP Massoud is a leader of the Massoud Foundation, which is involved in several projects in Panjshir.

15. (SBU) But Panjshiris tell us they expect more GOA funding as a result of their high-powered delegation in Kabul. A refrain we hear is that the Panjshir officials in Kabul are more interested in their personal welfare than in the province's well-being.

Non-Panjshir Kabul Officials: Even Less Focus on the Valley

16. (SBU) The non-Panjshir officials in Kabul are an even scarcer presence in the province. President Karzai has yet to visit Panjshir since his election, despite repeated invitations, according to the Governor. Locals recall he attended a commemoration for Ahmed Shah Massoud several years ago. Our contacts tell us Karzai enjoys little popularity in the valley, in part because Panjshiris believe Karzai has willfully neglected the valley. According to Parliamentarian Aref, Panjshiris suspect Karzai ignores them because they voted overwhelmingly for native son Qanooni in the 2004 elections. A USAID-supported Town Hall Meeting, held July 20 in Panjshir, proved to be a useful forum for airing of views.

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It was also notable, for the Governor and other Panjshiris, because the invited GOA officials did not attend.

Positive trend

17. (U) Despite the spotty presence of the GOA in Panjshir, four events this year, all supported by the PRT, attracted GOA officials to the valley:

-- On March 26, the Governor organized a "Civic Pride Day" with the attendance of WJ speaker Qanooni, WJ member (and former President) Rabbani, Parliamentarian Regestani, Parliamentarian (and former Defense Minister) Fahim Khan and Energy and Water Minister Ismael Khan.

-- On September 10, Panjshir hosted a commemoration of the fifth anniversary of Ahmed Shah Massoud's death. It brought together the biggest assembly of GOA officials in the valley at any single time: VP Massoud, Saleh, Bismalluh Khan, Senator Aref, WJ member Rabbani and Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development (MRRD) Minister Zia. Former office-holders were also present, including former Foreign Minister Abdullah.

-- On September 23, as arranged by the Ambassador, a discussion forum took up matters related to the Panjshir road project. The Deputy Minister of Public Works, Roosili, visited the valley for the first time in a public setting. He was accompanied by two Panjshir parliamentarians, Regestani and Azatyar. They engaged with local leaders on road issues, such as the decision to use a non-asphalt surface. Regestani noted the importance of the improved road in connecting the capital and the province, and portrayed himself as a link between the government in the Kabul and the people in Panjshir.

-- On October 11, another event served to profile GOA officials in Panjshir. Speakers at the opening of the Teachers, Training College included WJ Speaker Qanooni and Deputy Minister of Education Ghaznawi. The Governor praised Army Chief of Staff Bismullah Khan for transferring the building from his ministry to that of education; and thanked the Education Minister for officially designating the building a teachers, academy.

¶8. (U) Three of these four events have taken place this fall, suggesting a positive trend of a more active GOA presence in the valley. Asked if he regarded these events as an emerging pattern, Senator Aref concurred, but added that resources were still not flowing from Kabul to Panjshir as a result.

Resident GOA officials

¶9. (SBU) Panjshiris tend to view their Governor and line directors as provincial envoys to Kabul rather than GOA representatives in the province. Drawing on the Commanders' Emergency Relief Projects (CERP) funding, the PRT has supported the Governor and two of the line directors -- education and health -- who have demonstrated competence and commitment. The PRT has encouraged them to use our support to leverage the GOA for additional resources. A successful example pertains to the Teachers, Academy (see para 7 above). The best-resourced line directory in the valley is MRRD; but, with its reputation for substandard work, it does not represent the GOA with distinction.

"Kabulization"

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¶10. (U) In one respect, Kabul has significantly increased its presence in the valley. The USAID-supported road projects have now almost completed a paved link between the capital and the province. According to the police at the mouth of the valley, traffic in and out of Panjshir has increased three-fold this past year, much of it from Kabul. Kabulites often visit Panjshir on weekends as a respite from the crowded, dusty metropolis. Commerce, too, has picked up from Kabul, especially in the form of truck traffic, now more profitable given the better roads.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) There is more Panjshir in Kabul than Kabul in Panjshir, although the GOA has achieved a modest expansion of its presence in Panjshir this year. The PRT has assisted by supporting events that draw GOA officials and by resourcing GOA officials resident in the province, including the Governor and the few strong line directors. Perhaps most importantly, the USG has helped through its multi-million-dollar road projects. END COMMENT.
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